



Input Sought on Proposed Packer Certificate

The Rigging Committee of the Parachute Industry Association reported its progress at PIA's August 11-13 meeting in Madison, Wisconsin on a proposed program to train and evaluate main parachute packers. Ultimately, the committee plans to approach the Federal Aviation Administration to add a main parachute packer (MPP) certificate to the certification program for senior and master parachute riggers.

In particular, the committee is recruiting drop zones to track their current pack-for-pay programs for effectiveness, as well as collecting data on malfunctions whether packed by riggers, under rigger supervision, or by the user. USPA is also collecting similar data and trying to develop and promote a consistent means of reporting and evaluating it.

The group envisions the MPP certificate to work in conjunction with the current rules that allow anyone to pack a main parachute under the supervision of an FAA-certificated senior or master parachute rigger. But, under the MPP proposal, packers holding the MPP certificate would exercise the same privileges without rigger supervision. They would qualify for the certificate after training and independent evaluation specific to packing main parachutes.

The committee envisions that the MPP would gain experience on a variety of main parachute systems to prepare for the FAA's knowledge ("written") examination and an oral and practical examination by an FAA designee. Candidates would need to study the current FAA rules on packing and manufacturer's manuals and understand the pack-for-hire environment concerning real-world equipment, its users, the FAA rigger, pilot, and drop zone management. Rather than a day or more required to test an FAA senior rigger certificate, the subcommittee hopes to propose an exam that takes little more than an hour.

A subcommittee of the PIA Rigging Committee under Idaho & Montana DZ owner Abbie Mashaal has developed and administered a pilot training program to use as an example. Details to hammer out include keeping the same 18-year-old age requirement as a rigger. In the initial draft, a minimum of 50 pack jobs would be logged under supervision of a rigger on a minimum of five varieties of main parachute, including at least one tandem. The committee is also developing sample test questions and procedures to propose for testing. Ultimately, the effort will require buy-in from all the stakeholders resulting in actual changes to CFR 65 on parachute rigging and CFR 105 on parachute operations to accommodate the MPP certificate.

The goals of the MPP certification program target a better trained and informed packer, make it easier and more practical for main packers to operate independently, and a better experience for the end-user jumper of the equipment.

Further, packers for various contract groups require FAA rigger certificates, which are difficult and expensive to obtain. Current rigger certification requires training and evaluation on knowledge and skills main parachute packers don't need and, either way, don't specifically address main parachute packing. So

far, the idea of accepting the MPP certificate in lieu of the current FAA-rigger requirement has received welcome interest among those groups.

If the MPP certificate comes to fruition, the time frame would be years rather than months. The FAA changes its rules slowly and only after careful consideration. The subcommittee has more study, data collection, and development ahead of it. So far, after some initial resistance before the scope of the program was better explained and understood, the project appears to be navigating calm waters.

For more information on the MPP certificate program and to engage with the working committee, drop zones and other interested persons may reach Kirk Smith, PIA Rigging Committee Chair or Mr. Mashaal, at mpp.pilot.program@pia.com.